

Response to Letter to Anzaldúa

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How ironic is it that I was asked to write a letter addressed to Gloria Anzaldúa for my border consciousness class in 2014? We were asked to identify the multiple borders that exist in our lives. By far, the greatest borders that taxed my soul that year, were the division between my education and every other aspect of my life. That quarter I have had to make the choice multiple times between my education and my health, my education and my family, my education and serving my community (without my community which I would not even be at UCLA). I have reflected many times about the violence of the institution and the many forms it takes.

During a Chicana/o Studies lecture in the spring of 2014, my professor states that after Gloria Anzaldúa's death, the University of California, Santa Cruz awarded her a posthumous doctorate degree. Why is it that we are only valuable to the academy after death? Gloria was employed by the University of California when she died, yet she couldn't afford medical insurance. She suffered from a breadth of health complications from diabetes and because of the lack of access to health insurance (Dahms). Her friend and scholar, Ana Louise Keating remembers how much time and effort it took for Anzaldúa to write due to all of her health issues.

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I remember the fear of not knowing what would become of me when I became very ill with daily fevers. When it hit me that I had to leave school and I didn't know when I would back, it was painful. I spent weeks in bed with my mystery illness. I felt myself burn, shape and reshape. My coatlicue state.

I did eventually get better, but it was a long complicated process that involved calls with our relatives in Mexico who are medical doctors and a trip to Tijuana to get bloodwork done. And that first sigh of relief when I finally had a diagnosis and medication I could take because the doctors in the US had failed me and called me a medical mystery instead of helping me.

I was shedding skins. When I did manage to come back to school after dropping the quarter, the campus felt like a violent place to be. A place that would never consider the kind of aggressions women of color face daily as first generation students. The ivory tower felt extra ivory despite the fact that the school was constructed brick by brick by Mexican laborers in the early 1900s.

It is really disturbing that students are permitted to die, when the university profits from us and that the only value we possess is from the knowledge we produce.

We cannot count on these institutions to protect our bodies from the violence that is *la pobreza*. Similar to Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde died while employed by a university. She was mandated to continue teaching even as her body could not take it, since she was suffering from liver cancer at the time of her death (Gumbs). The university asks us to produce work under a capitalist system that commodifies labor and bodies. It is no surprise that these women have died at the hands of the university.

The university has killed our people. It has taken out so many great minds. I can't help but think about all the spirits it kills daily as well. It has been well documented that racism produces very physical side effects in the people of color that it affects. Students drop out all the time from being under the daily fire of microaggressions in departments that do not welcome students of color. Our existence at the university is resistance. First generation students often face dismissal for subpar grades, but where is the financial and emotional support for them. Students grades drop because they are busy organizing for worker and student rights on campus because administration refuses to protect those that work for and attend the university. We are not welcome, but we stick around.

Attending the university is a daily battle. Most low income, people of color don't ever find support systems. My greatest support system at the university has been organizing. I have found my kindred spirits in resisting against the violence of the institution. I have found love and comfort in a hostile place. The university was never

intended to welcome people like me. It purposely excludes them and perpetuates institutional violence against them. Not to mention that people of color have had historically low retention rates at the university. They chew us up and spit us out.

REFERENCES

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